

DISCOURSERS



The above ladies were at the University of N.D. at Grand Forks where a session of the Farmers Union Field Workers met. Left to right; Miss Margaret Nix of Winnipeg, Canada, Educational director of the Manitoba Health Plan; Mrs. Ruth Abernathy, director of Human Relations, St. Paul, Minn., and Mrs. Jerome Evanson, the tireless Director of Education of the Farmers Union of North Dakota.

Last Spring, Mrs. Evanson testified before a congressional committee on the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill, which embodies the recommendations of President Truman's health program. Mrs. Evanson's testimony carried such weight and force for a health program for rural people that she has now been asked to prepare a 3,000-word article for the TWENTYEITH ANNUAL DEBATE HANDBOOK, put out by the National University Extension Association. Mrs. Evanson's article is titled: "Farmers and Medical Care."

Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Evanson's two sons, Chuck and Jimmy, are both veterans of this war. Jimmy is studying for forestry and Chuck is training to become a commercial pilot and is already doing solo flights.

ANYWAY I TRIED

Gene Wierbach

I've always been a very careful person. I never cross against a red light, avoid walking or even running under ladders and always shave the right side of my face first. When the smallest amount of salt is spilled, immediately a pinch of it is tossed over my left shoulder. Then that old bugaboo about counting to ten while in an argument. That's no good either. Due to my tardy counting I received a lovely black-eye. What a time I had explaining that one, what with the doorknob-black-eye-story being so thinly worn. I shudder when meeting people on stairways. No doubt a throw-back to a recent stretch in the army when once, just ONCE mind you, I tried passing an officer on the stairs and... well I tried anyway. Now take the four-leaf-clover-deal. Other people can find them easy enough, but do I? No. After searching all the vacant lots in my end of town and the neighbor's flower-beds I gave up and bought one. Yes, a perfect specimen in a plastic case with key-cain attached. Then what happened, you guessed right, I lost it along with the front door key (which I had borrowed from my mother-in-law). Now I'll have to take the lock off and wait my turn at the locksmith.

Then a friend told me about carrying a small lump of coal in my pocket. This to ward off the Evil One. Ever since then I have had the devil-to-pay when anything went wrong. I guess its no use. I'm through trying to prevent things happening with the use of charms, tokens and such trivia. But wait a minute. Another friend just called me about the healing properties of a buckeye. He

says its a sure cure for rheumatism. Of course there IS a catch to it. He says it must be abuckeye picked in the light of the moon from a tree in a cemetery, and must be carried in a pocket nearest the heart. Well... here I go again.

LETTERS and COMMENTS

FROM THE NFF DIRECTOR

Dear Vyts:

One of the nicest things about this years Festival was having so many there who had been absent since the war drums began to beat in our country. You have been away for another reason. Somehow we really never doubted you would join us again. I guess your faith was so strong that we shared it. At any rate it was grand beyond words to see you with the old fighting and dancing spirit, looking better than we have ever seen you!

Packing up to leave Cleveland, setting our house in order in Philadelphia, trying to out-run a pesky cold which attached itself on to me (lost my coat and didn't have time to search for it) has kept me from giving more than a fleeting glimpse backward to our twelfth annual "get-together".

Some of the things that stand out in my mind about the Cleveland venture are the cold and rainy days on the Western Reserve. In contrast to the weather, however, I remember the warmth, fine friendships and grand co-operative spirit of so many people of that city. There was no placidity about our subject which touched on racial and national cultures in Cleveland, which is made up of so many varied ones. They would argue at the drop of the hat, but did everything possible to help put things over.

One of the many things I liked was that no person said afterward, "You should have made a more glamorous show." If they had criticisms, I am sure they were along the lines the participants and leaders are thinking and feeling, "Let us make it more real, more down to earth, more genuinely representative of the very best in folk expressions." Why continue unless we strive to reach that goal?

At first, some of our Cleveland friends asked if we thought the participants would really come this year. They reminded us that we had skipped a year and wondered if interest had not lagged. They did not know us, did they, Vyts? Many of those present had been absent five years, scattered to the four winds, but they had not forgotten! All that has happened in those years had only strengthened the conviction of us all that the "brotherhood-of-man" idea must indeed become a reality. Racial and national antagonisms, fierce battles around the world, even the victory of the allied nations had not brought it about.

We were not surprised that after the second month in Cleveland, our program was "chucked full." "Why not try to get together the human way? Why not look beneath the surface and try to discover the universal similarities in themes of songs, patterns of the dance, the common origins and reasons back of both?" we all thought. Though we did not talk much about these things, as the festival programs unfolded, I feel very sure that these thoughts and hopes of leaders and participants reached across the footlights and told their stories to our audiences.

Sincerely,
Sarah Gertrude Knott
Director, National Folk Festival.

AS FOR MYSELF

This was one of my most interesting summers and I certainly did get to see North Dakota, the width and length of it.

Before coming to N. D. I stopped off for a few days in St. Paul, Minn., and White Bear Lake where I had a most pleasant time, visiting with my friends and cousins. One afternoon, several of us Fairhopeans, Bill Welch, Edna Rockwell (both were attending the U. of Minn.) took in the entire city, visiting every thing of interest. Edna was a VILTIS correspondent for Fairhope while I was at Cottage Hill, I hadn't see her in nearly two years, and it was grand to see her again.

My first camping spot where I was in charge of recreation, was at a Dude ranch in the Bad Lands, located in the Western part of N. D. near the Montana line. The trip to reach the ranch has taken me through the entire length of the State which seems to be divided into three sections: 1) the very flat Red River Valley which for miles and miles the land is like a smooth table; 2) the rolling country with its coulees, valleys, knolls and hills, then come the 3) Bad Lands composed of canyons. Canyons seem to be deep valleys with mountains way down below. The first two sections are well cultivated with huge farm tracks of wheat, barley, flax and other grains. What is most notable is the lack of trees. All trees seem to be concentrated in the cities, like Arabian Oasis; once out of the city there are no more trees. Often farmsteads have trees, and often one sees shelter belts (a belt of trees planted to stop dust storms.) The trees that do grow are scraggy and sorry looking (they look much better in the cities, for the cities as a rule, are in valleys protected from the open and severe winter winds and intense summer heat). The Russian Olives seems to grow successfully. Most trees in that section of the land seen in the Missouri Valley, between Bismarck and Mandan. Once Mandan is passed the country commences to assume a very rugged aspect. One sees hills of scoria (burned clay) that appears like pilings, as if someone deliberately piled with chips of brick. There are clinker (burned coal) hills too. It seems that there are underground coal mines that have been burning for centuries which burns the clay and turns it into brick.

The first scene of the Bad Lands is the Cedar Canyon, with its steep hills way down under. Its outstanding features are the petrified woods and forests. From then on petrified wood becomes a common sight; you see it built into the lookout points, fire places and bridge ledges. Then comes the Painted Canyon — a scene to behold; an expansive valley of colorful mountains portraying various strata of earth. There, I also saw my first coyotes. Soon after, we started descending into the Bad Lands. The formation of some of the hills was most un-natural; grotesque and bewitching. Imaginary cities, cathedrals and picturesque shapes of animals or objects are easily visualized. The trip is truly enchanting. No description can do justice to fact seen there. Theodore Roosevelt's ranch, now a State Park, is something out of this world. Thus, our car rolled on among winding roads, up a hill and down one and up a still higher one, until we reached the historic town of Medora, nestling deep in the little Missouri valley, in the safety of high scoria buttes.

Medora is a very small town. There are only about five towns in the large Billings County, and Medora is the largest, and most of the official County buildings are located in Belfield which is in a neighboring county. (In N. D. a town may be composed of one or more grain elevators. If even there be but one house near the grain elev-

ator it is a town. Many towns are of barely a half dozen buildings. Even then, towns such as these, are often far apart). Medora was established by a colorful French Nobleman, Antoine Manca de Vallombrosa Marquis De Mores who tried to establish a large scale meat packing plant. His chateau with its rich furnishings, still stands on an elevation overlooking the town, on the other side of the Little Missouri. His chateau is now a historical museum, and a statue of that young and handsome nobleman stands in a special built square in the center of the town. That little park, surrounded with Russian Olives, is kept in trim condition. The Marquis was slain during a hunting trip in Africa. His sons, who still live in France, come down almost annually, to visit the town where they raised and which was named after their mother. What ever possessed the nobleman to come and choose that spot, of all places in United States, is indeed a mystery.

Five miles past Medora, is the dude ranch where the first All-State camp of the Farmers Union was held. It too was in a valley, protected by steep buttes. An enchanting spot, but barren. Sage brush — a low but pleasant smelling weed, is the sure thing that grows there in abundance. The grass is poor. Yellow blossoming French weeds, sweet clover and mustard weeds, add a bit of color to the drab earth. Rattle snakes are at home there. The scenery is gorgeous. We also took an extensive trip through the Teddy Roosevelt Park whose beauty is beyond description. There I also saw my first prairie dog city. I went out of the car to pick a few gumbo lilies and false mallow when we heard a strange barking and we noticed that we were in a territory of many mounds with large holes. Beyond one of these mounds, barely head showing, one of the prairie dogs barked to give warning to the others that intruders are about. Soon, even he disappeared and the city was silent.

My next camp was in Jamestown, a lovely city, also in a valley, on the shores of the James River. It has a population of about 10,000 and it has a college and many fine institutions. The camp was composed of the Farmer's Union mothers who came from all parts of the State. The Farmer's Union, a Farm CO-Op group, is an outstanding organization in North Dakota and it does excellent work. The organization is interested in every phase of the welfare of their people, be it economy, education or health. During the camps, various people well versed in certain subjects, were brought down who delivered educational discourses covering many subjects including Racial Tolerance. It is a wonderful piece of work on the part of the organization and a wonderful opportunity for the folks on the farms. It gives them an insight of how others are living, outside of their domain, and also a contact with the "out side world". Many of the mothers who are ever busy with farm chores during the summer and snow bound in their farms during the winter, with town so far removed from their homes, barely get a chance to get away. Yet, it was surprising to find among these lowly women, such who loved to recite poetry, who wrote poems and who sang beautifully concert pieces — and no boogy-woogy. It just didn't seem that one was among farmers. The farm youngsters seem to be a healthy and clean-cut group and talented. During our program there were piano presentations by Bach, Tchaikowsky, Beethoven and others, as well as recitations and classical songs. It was amazing! And they appeared to be a far brighter and a more intelligent group than the average city kid of that age.

A trip of great interest to me was the one taken to Fort Totten, in the Sioux Indian Reservation. That was my first visit to an Indian reservation. Needless to say, the Indians did not wear any ragalia, but looked like